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Guidance

# Actions for HE providers during the coronavirus outbreak

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This is guidance on the range of measures the government has announced (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-package-for-universities-and-students>) to protect students and the higher education sector from the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Students should also read the student guide to coronavirus (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/student-guide-to-coronavirus/questions-and-answers/>) for information about securing a place at university, the clearing process, accommodation and finance. We expect all students who want to go to university, and meet their entry requirements, to be able to access higher education. If a student has accepted an offer, meets the conditions, and decides to take it up, nothing has changed.

## **Student number controls**

The government has announced that temporary and limited student number controls will be put in place for domestic and EU students at English providers for the academic year 2020 to 2021 to ensure a fair, structured distribution of students across providers.

Provider level student number controls will be determined taking into account provider forecasts of growth and will allow for 5% growth above this. The Education Secretary will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places, with 5,000 of those places ringfenced for students studying nursing or allied health courses, on top of the controls.

These number controls will only apply to full-time, undergraduate, UK/EU domiciled students, with certain specified exemptions. For example, the control will not apply to international (non-EU) students. The exact level of the control and exemptions will be set out shortly.

These controls apply to English providers. We will have further discussions on the application of student number controls with the devolved administrations.

The introduction of student number controls is part of a wider package to help stabilise the Higher Education sector in response to the coronavirus outbreak and is in place for the academic year 2020 to 2021.

## **Allocation of the additional 10,000 places**

10,000 additional places will be made available to providers on top of the controls. 5,000 of those places will be ringfenced for students studying nursing or allied health courses. The remaining 5,000 places will be allocated at the discretion of the Education Secretary. Further details will be published shortly.

## **Abiding by the student number controls**

In the event that a provider does not abide by its student number controls, the government will address the consequences for the stability and the sustainability of the HE sector by reducing the sums available to the provider through the student finance system in the subsequent academic year.

## **New condition of registration**

The Office for Students, the regulator for England, will consult on a new temporary condition of registration requiring English higher education providers to refrain from conduct which could have a material negative effect on the interests of students or the stability or integrity of the sector.

This may include using admissions tactics, such as the inappropriate use of unconditional offers, which put undue pressure on students or conduct with a view to gaining an unfair commercial advantage over other providers.

## **Enhanced clearing process for this year**

Each year there are over 30,000 courses available in clearing, and we expect the number in 2020 to be even higher. Clearing provides new opportunities for students to review their decisions and to change their firm choice, should they wish.

In the weeks leading up to results day, UCAS will be running a high-profile and multi-channel campaign, ‘Get Ready for Clearing’, which will be targeted at all applicants and explain how to make the most of the post-results period. This will enable students to access further information, advice and guidance which will help them reflect on their choices. They will have the opportunity to release themselves into clearing if they decide to withdraw from an offer they have already accepted and to consider other opportunities that might be more suitable, particularly if their grades are higher than they had anticipated.

This year students will be able to access better and more personalised information, advice and guidance, and a new and easier to use means to change course/provider if, having reflected further and taking into account their awarded grades, they decide to change their firm choice.

## **Publication date of A level and other exam results**

AS and A level results will be published on 13 August, as originally planned. This will enable progression to higher education to take place in the normal way.

We have made clear that the aim is for results for other qualifications used for progression to higher education to be received at the same time as A level grades. Results days for these qualifications are set by individual exam boards. If you are taking such qualifications, you should check the planned results day with your school or college.

Read about how GCSEs, AS & A levels will be awarded in summer 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/how-gcses-as-a-levels-will-be-awarded-in-summer-2020>).

## **Hardship funds**

### **Access to student hardship and mental health funds**

Students experiencing financial hardship as a result of coronavirus should contact their higher education provider. Many providers have hardship funds which students can apply to for assistance.

The Office for Students has published guidance for providers (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus/provider-guide-to-coronavirus/questions-and-answers/>) on the use of existing student premium funding to support students facing hardship.

## **Use of student premium funding to increase hardship funds**

We have worked with the Office for Students to clarify that providers can draw upon existing student premium funding, without sanction, to increase their hardship funds, and support disadvantaged students affected by coronavirus.

Providers can use the funding, totalling £46m across April and May, towards student hardship funds and mental health support, as well as to support providers' access and participation plans.

Further details are in the guidance for providers (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus/provider-guide-to-coronavirus/questions-and-answers/>).

## **International student recruitment**

International students will be able to study in the UK in the academic year 2020 to 2021.

Higher education providers will be flexible in accommodating applicants' circumstances where possible, including if they are unable to travel to the UK in time for the start of the academic year. In terms of visa arrangements, the Home Office has published guidance for those affected by changes to UK immigration and borders due to coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents>). This guidance includes the latest information for those who might have questions around visa expiry, switching visa category within the UK, distance learning and working-hour restrictions for student doctors and nurses.

## **Changes to the graduate immigration route**

The graduate immigration route will be available to international students who have completed a degree at undergraduate level or above at a higher education provider with a track record of compliance and who have a valid Tier 4 visa at the time of their application.

The new route (<https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/10/14/fact-sheet-graduate-immigration-route/>) will be launched in the summer of 2021, meaning that any eligible student who graduates in the summer of 2021 or after will be able to apply for the route.

This includes students who have already started their courses, even if, due to coronavirus, they have needed to undertake some of their learning remotely.

## **Flexibilities for international students and visas**

The government will be applying discretion under current circumstances to ensure that international students are not negatively impacted due to coronavirus. The Home Office has published guidance for those affected by changes to UK immigration and borders due to coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents>). This guidance includes the latest information for those who might have questions around visa expiry, switching visa category within the UK, distance learning and working-hour restrictions for student doctors and nurses.

## **Business support from the government**

Higher education providers who are facing financial difficulty due to coronavirus can apply for the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme>) or the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-coronavirus-large-business-interruption-loan-scheme>) and should consider approaching their bank to apply for the appropriate scheme if they judge that is needed.

The Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme, which may be relevant to many providers, opened for applications on 20 April. Larger providers may also wish to explore the COVID-19 Corporate Financing Facility (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-covid-19-corporate-financing-facility>) and should liaise with their bank to discuss eligibility. If their bank does not issue commercial paper, UK Finance has published a list of those banks that are able to assist (<https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/covid-19-corporate-financing-facilities>).

## **Accessing the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme**

Higher Education providers are eligible to apply for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

We expect that in most circumstances providers will be able to continue paying their staff as usual. Where this is not the case, the new Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme put forward as part of the HM Treasury package of support (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) has been set up to help pay people's wages and keep people in employment, including those on short-term contracts.

See guidance on financial support for education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care#higher-education>) for information on how HE providers should access the scheme. Grant funding from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme should not duplicate other sources of public funding where these are being maintained, such as UK home student tuition fees.

## **Tuition fee loans payments**

In order to help prevent any potential short-term cashflow issues for higher education providers, the Student Loans Company (SLC) is reprofiling the termly tuition fee payments to all providers to 50/0/50 (from the current 25/25/50) in the academic year 2020 to 2021.

SLC have designed a system to make a double payment in the first term, without triggering a corresponding doubling of student liability. This will increase payments to providers upfront, without the student incurring additional interest on their loans, or an increased liability if they withdraw. This approach will apply to England, Wales and Northern Ireland simultaneously.

## **University Research Sustainability Taskforce**

The taskforce brings together ministers at the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to work with the devolved administrations and sector stakeholders. The taskforce will provide an advisory forum for ministers to engage with university research and capability to support it to contribute effectively to UK society and the economy in the recovery and beyond.

It will:

- share information and intelligence about the health of the university research and the knowledge exchange carried out by and within HE providers
- identify potential impacts on the sustainability of university research and knowledge exchange directly arising from the response to coronavirus
- share intelligence on government and other sources of funding for research, and develop approaches building on these to address the impacts of coronavirus and protect and sustain HE research capability and capacity
- where possible share evidence of the impacts on university research and knowledge exchange of the taskforce's advice